

PinkMonkey® Literature Notes on . . .

Sample MonkeyNotes

Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.

The Assistant

by

Bernard Malamud

1957



MonkeyNotes by Jane Johnson

Reprinted with permission from TheBestNotes.com Copyright © 2005, All Rights Reserved
Distribution without the written consent of PinkMonkey.com or TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.

KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story is set in Brooklyn, New York. Most of it is set in Morris Bober's small grocery store.

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Morris Bober - Morris Bober is an older man, an immigrant, who spends many hours, day after.....

Frank Alpine - Frank Alpine is the person who is "*The Assistant*." Frank is twenty-five. The first time Frank and Morris Bober meet is when Frank robs Morris. But, Morris does.....

Helen Bober - Helen Bober is Morris' twenty-three year old daughter. Frank is fascinated by Helen. He feels both love and lust for her. Before the beginning of the story, Helen had a relationship with.....

Minor Characters

Ida Bober - Ida Bober is the wife of Morris and the mother of Helen. She frequently works in.....

Ephraim Bober - Ephraim Bober was the son of Morris and Ida Bober. He died years ago as a.....

Julius Karp - Julius Karp is the father of Louis Karp. He owns a liquor store that is.....

Louis Karp - Louis Karp, the son of Julius, works in his father's store. He is lazy.

Sam Pearl - Sam Pearl is the father of Nat Pearl. He is married to Goldie Pearl and is also the father of.....

Nat Pearl - Nat Pearl, the son of Sam and Goldie Pearl, is a law student. He has a.....

Detective Minogue - Detective Minogue is the father of Ward Minogue. The father and.....

Ward Minogue - Ward Minogue is the son of Detective Minogue. He is a criminal. He was with

Many other minor characters are outlined in the complete MonkeyNotes

CONFLICT

The conflict in this story centers around as well as inside of Frank Alpine. There are two sides to Frank, a good side and a bad side. Both Morris Bober and the good side of Frank could be thought of as the protagonist. The bad side of Frank could be thought of as the antagonist.

The climax takes place toward the end of the sixth chapter. It begins when Julius Karp.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Morris Bober's life is centered on his store. He keeps it open long hours, but has not been doing very well financially since Schmitz opened a competing grocery store. Another reason that Morris is not doing well financially is that he never cheats his customers.

One day two thugs rob Morris. One hits him on the head. Soon after that, Frank Alpine, who has come from San Francisco, starts to work in the store for practically nothing. The business improves while Morris.....

THEMES

The struggle toward realization of what one can be - *The Assistant* tells the story of Frank Alpine's journey, with aid and guidance from Morris Bober, from wannabe gangster to good human being. Frank is.....

Other themes are outlined in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

MOOD

The mood of *The Assistant* is bleak. Much of the time, the weather is cold. The characters are poor, except....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Bernard Malamud grew up in an environment not unlike the setting of this novel. He was born in Brooklyn, New York on April 26, 1914. His father, Max Malamud was a grocer in Brooklyn. His parents were Jewish immigrants.

He attended Erasmus Hall High School, where he later taught night classes. His education continued at City College of New York where he graduated in 1936. He received a Master's degree at

LITERARY/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The author's descriptions of the setting of the story were undoubtedly influenced by where the.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

Summary

Morris Bober starts the morning in his grocery store the same way that he starts every morning. He brings in the bottles of milk and the rolls that have been left by delivery men. Then he waits on an old Polish woman who is his first customer every day. Every day she buys a roll on her way to work. For it she pays three cents. She is the main reason that Morris opens at six o'clock each morning. There are very few other customers at that hour.

Later, the daughter of a local alcoholic comes in requesting credit. Morris allows her to have some credit. Then, he hides the fact from his wife, Ida, who will be down the stairs and into the store later. When she comes down, she will be checking the cash register.

Morris sees his tenant, Nick Fusco, return to his place with a bag from Schmitz's grocery. It seems that all the neighbors are shopping there these days.

Breitbart, the bulb peddler, stops by and Morris prepares, for him, tea with lemon, which he drinks.

Ida comes downstairs to relieve Morris. First, they discuss the hope that someone will buy the store. Julius Karp, who owns the neighboring liquor store, knows someone who might buy it.

Karp is the one who rented to Schmitz the property where the other grocery is now located. This had upset Morris, but Karp had acted as though there was no reason for worry.

The scene changes to the subway and Helen Bober, who is the twenty-three year old daughter of Morris and Ida. She is returning home after a day working at Levenspiel's Louisville Panties and Bras. She is uncomfortable when Nat Pearl talks to her. She has known Nat for years. They grew up together. But things are more complicated now than when they were children. Recently, she slept with Nat, but afterward

discovered that he only wanted to have sex, not a more meaningful relationship such as she herself wanted. Her reaction to this discovery was to avoid him whenever possible. Being on the subway together makes this impossible, however. Nat sees that she is reading *Don Quixote*.

The scene shifts back to Morris as he awakens from his nap and heads downstairs. Helen arrives home and gives her paycheck to her father. Every pay day, Helen gives her paycheck to her parents and receives back only a small amount. Morris, who feels badly about his inability to send Helen to college, offers to let her have more of her paychecks for herself, but she declines.

Karp stops by the store wanting to know if the potential buyer came by. Karp also mentions a car that has driven by repeatedly. Karp is afraid that someone is planning a robbery. Morris is to call the police when he hears Karp's voice. He leaves and later calls Morris, telling him to call the police. But, Morris doesn't get to the phone before two robbers enter his store. Morris tells them that he has no money, but one of the robbers, the one with the gun, calls him a liar and hits him in the face. The other robber gives Morris a cup of water. After they search the store and again ask for money, receiving an unsatisfactory response, the robber with the gun hits Morris a second time. This time, Morris passes out.

Notes

The robber who did not hit Morris is the title character, "The Assistant." When he and Morris meet again, Morris will not realize that he was one of the robbers.

There is an admonition to writers that says to write about what you know. That seems to be what the author did in writing this novel. His father, not unlike Morris Bober, was an immigrant and operated a grocery store when the author was young.

Notice that ethnicity is an important part of life within the setting of the story. Notice also that the neighborhood has a wide variety of ethnicities.

Morris and Ida Bober speak English with a sprinkling of Yiddish words, but continue to use Yiddish grammar. This is very helpful in giving their conversations an authentic feel.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Frank Alpine - Frank Alpine is "The Assistant." The story is about how Frank changes from a wannabe gangster to a good human being. The change takes time and is not smooth. Frank takes "two steps forward and one step back," but he finally reaches a worthy goal.

Frank does not achieve his goal by himself. He has help from Morris Bober, who is like a father to him. He also is guided by stories that he heard as a child, an orphan, about the life of Saint Francis.

Frank is not Jewish, a fact that causes Ida Bober to worry about the possibility that he might develop a relationship with her daughter, Helen.

Additional major characters are analyzed in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

This story is based on two medieval legends. One is the life of Saint Francis. Saint Francis is mentioned in several places in *The Assistant* and there are additional references to him as well. The characters in the second legend upon which this story is based are not mentioned by name like Saint Francis is. That legend is.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

In many of Bernard Malamud's stories we find the theme of a struggle by an unworldly fool to survive in a world ruled by worldly "wise" men and their rules. This is one of those stories. Julius Karp and Charlie Sobeloff are successful because they are worldly "wise" men. Morris Bober is the unworldly fool.

The struggle toward the realization of what one can be - *The Assistant* shows Morris Bober as a good example of what one can be. Frank is not like him in the beginning, although he does have a desire to be like him, a necessary preliminary condition. Frank has been deeply influenced in the past by stories.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

AUTHOR'S STYLE

Bernard Malamud is, at times, labeled a Jewish writer. He is Jewish and he is a writer. But, he is more than a Jewish writer. While he always remembered that he was Jewish, he likewise always knew that.....

RISING ACTION

The rising action occurs between the first chapter and the sixth chapter. In these chapters Frank becomes close to Morris and to Helen. He helps run the store while Morris is laid up. He asks very little in.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action takes place between the climax and the outcome, between the rape of Helen and the point at which Frank becomes good. An important point in the falling action is the death of

POINT OF VIEW

The Assistant is written from a limited omniscient point of view. This allows the reader to understand what is going on in the minds of some of the characters.

GENRE

The genre of this writing is novel, adult fiction.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS / QUOTES

The following page numbers are in the reprint of *The Assistant* by Dell Publishing in March of 1978. It was Dell's first Laurel printing.

1. He said with sarcasm, "What worries her?" Meaning: the store, his health, that most of her meager wages went to keep up payments on the house; that she had wanted a college education but had got instead a job she disliked. Her father's daughter, no wonder she didn't feel like eating. (p. 9)

The quote above is from Morris Bober and refers to his daughter. This "in a nutshell," tells us all of Helen Bober's problems, that is, all that her father knows about.

2. So she promised herself next time it would go the other way; first mutual love, then loving, harder maybe on the nerves, but easier in memory. (p.15)

Above refers to a concern of Helen that her father does not know about. Helen had been intimate with Nat Pearl earlier and felt bad because he was only interested in the moment, had no thought about the future.....

Eighteen additional quotations are analyzed in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

SYMBOLISM - SYMBOLS

Roses - Wooden roses mean unrealized love. A real rose means real love. After the rape, Frank carved a rose for Helen. She threw it into the trash. This occurred at the end of the seventh chapter. At the end of

MOTIFS

Saint Francis of Assisi - Saint Francis of Assisi is repeatedly mentioned in connection with Frank Alpine. Saint Francis first appeared in Frank's life when, as a boy in an orphanage, he heard stories.....

IMAGERY

Snow - Snow is used to create an image of purity. It is also used to create an image of absence of

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *The Assistant*

Author: Bernard Malamud

Date Published: 1957

Meaning of the Title: Refers to Frank Alpine, who works in the grocery store as an assistant to Morris Bober

Setting: Brooklyn, NY, mostly in a small grocery store

Genre: novel, adult fiction

Protagonist: That part of Frank Alpine that wants to be good, and Morris Bober.....

VOCABULARY LIST

The author uses Yiddish words as well as Yiddish grammar to give conversations an authentic immigrant flavor.

Here is a sampling of some of the words that he uses, along with translations:

Gesheft - business

Gelt - money

Goy - a person who is not Jewish.....

STUDY QUESTIONS / MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

- Where did Frank grow up?
 - San Francisco and Oakland
 - Minneapolis and St. Paul
 - San Diego and Encinitas
 - Fort Lauderdale and Miami
 - Boston and Concord
- How old is Morris Bober?
 - 67
 - 72
 - 57
 - 60
 - 77.....

Answer Key: 1) a 2) d

ESSAY TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- Compare *The Assistant* to another of Bernard Malamud's stories, a short story, or a novel. How are they

different? How are they similar?

2.) Compare Morris Bober and Julius Karp.....

Copyright ©2005 TheBestNotes.com.

Reprinted with permission of TheBestNotes.com. All Rights Reserved.

Distribution without the written consent of PinkMonkey.com and TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS